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ABSTRACT

While most studies indicate a positive influence of the working mother on adolescent daughters, relatively little research on the effects of maternal employment has been done in South Africa. This study was conducted to determine whether there are differences between South African adolescent daughters of working mothers and non-working mothers in terms of intelligence and academic performance, work motivation and study orientation, personality and adjustment, interests and career choices, mother-daughter relationships, and attitudes toward maternal employment. Data were obtained from first-year female college students with working mothers (N=91) or non-working mothers (N=48). Subjects completed the Senior Aptitude Test; the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes; the 19 Field Interest Inventory; the Personal, Home, Social, and Formal Relations Questionnaire; portions of the Thematic Apperception Test; and a Biographical Questionnaire. No significant differences could be found in any of the measures between daughters of working mothers and daughters of non-working mothers. (NB)

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THE EFFECT OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT ON THE ADOLESCENT DAUGHTER

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Paper presented at the 47th Annual Convention of the International Council of Psychologists, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, June 2-6, 1989

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THE EFFECT OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT ON THE ADOLESCENT DAUGHTER

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Due to the fact that maternal employment as a phenomenon has come to stay, a great many researchers have tried to determine what the effect of the mother's abscence will be on the child, seeing that she has traditionally been regarded as the emotional nurturer of her children. The present study investigates the influence of maternal employment on the adolescent daughter. A critical evaluation of the literature reveals that maternal employment seems to be becoming more of a modal than a rare pattern. It seems also that not only is employment valuable for the mother of adolescents because it provides an additional source of stimulation, a sense of competence and an alternative role for the empty nest period, but it also fits well with the needs of the child, who at this stage requires greater autonomy. Few studies have reported negative effects on the adolescent, while a number have found positive effects.

Studies done with younger children indicated that sons of working mothers experience more problems than sons of non-working mothers (Gold & Andres, 1978b). Studies done with adolescents on the other hand indicated that both sons and daughters seem to be better adjusted when their mothers work (Gold & Andres, 1978a). According to these researchers the reason lies in the less restrictive parenting attitudes and the greater involvement of the father in families where the mother works. It is also possible that the adjustment of the daughter is fascilitated by stronger feminist attitudes and the greater satisfaction experienced by both father and mother when the mother is employed. Other studies indicate that the daughter experience greater self-esteem and respect their parents more when the mother works because of self-orientated reasons (e.g. achievement needs) rahter than of family orientated reasons (e.g. financial reasons) (Lamb, 1982).

Burke and Weir (1978) indicated that the working mother has no influence on the son, but that the daughter experiences more life-stress, less psychological well-being and less support from their mothers. The reason being, according to these researchers, that while girls remain psychologically dependent longer than boys, they need more attention and reassurance from significant others for their self-definition and self-esteem. Therefore the researchers recommend that other persons in the social network like fathers and peers should be available to fill potential nurturant and supportive functions. However, according to Burke and Weir, as the supportive social network for girls is expanded, together with changing stereotyped sex roles, it could be expected that the vulnerability of the young daughter and the pressure she experiences at this specific stage, will diminish.

Irrespective however, most studies indicate a positive influence of the working mother on especially the adolescent daughter. Hoffman (1979) indicated that daughters of working mothers are more spontaneous, independent, active and motivated, they perform better on a number of academic indices and report better social and personality adjustment. Gold and Andres (1978a) also found daughters of working mothers to be better adjusted, that they expect high social standards and show less tendencies to withdraw.

Earlier studies regarding academic performance indicated discrepant findings. Some studies reported no significant difference between children of working mothers and children of non-working mothers. Others indicated that children of working mothers showed a poorer performance, while still others indicated that sons of working mothers show lower performance (Nelson, 1969). Almquist and Angrist (1970) on the other hand, proposed that daughters of working mothers are more motivated to achieve. Later studies, however, showed no significant difference between the groups (Gold & Andres, 1978a; Reis & Gold, 1977).

Studies regarding sex role orientation have repeatedly indicated that adolescents (and younger children) of working mothers exhibit more egalitarian and less stereotyped attitudes than children of working mothers (Almquist & Angrist, 1970; Douvan, 1963; Lamb, 1982). In addition, Gilroy, Talierco and Steinbacher (1981) found that daughters of working mothers exhibited less fear of success and more androgeny than daughters of working mothers. Reasons postulated for this finding lie in variables like a greater freedom of thought and independence training, while the mother's modelling of assertive, independent behaviour also plays a role. Gold and Andres (1978a) and Belsky, Lerner and Spanier (1984) found especially the daughters of working mothers to be less stereotyped towards the feminine role. Pasquali and Callegri (1975) indicated on the other hand, that it is not the mother's working per se that influences her daughter's sex role orientation, but rather her satisfaction in what she does. The daughter will therefore identify with her mother if the latter experiences satisfaction, being it as a housewife or as a career woman.

In conjunction with sex role orientation is the child's career role orientation. Maternal employment seems to be the most consistent and best documented variable that accounts for the deviation from traditional feminine roles in children and adolescents (Belsky et al., 1984). Daughters of working mothers aspire to a career outside the house more often, often perform better at tertiary institutions, aspire towards more advanced qualifications, while female university students that choose a more male orientated career are usually those whose mothers had worked (Almquist & Angrist, 1970; Hoffman, 1974). Macke and Morgan (1978) found that the quality of mother-daughter-interaction plays a role in the work orientation of the daughter. When the interaction was high, daughters of working mothers planned to work earlier in the lives of their own children, while daughters of non-working mothers planned to work later. According to these researchers the mother's career status also plays a role in her daughter's career orientation. A high status career leads to a high work orientation in daughters and vice versa. Lighter (1980) found on the other hand, that it is not the mother's work status that has an influence on her daughter's work orientation, but rather the father's attitude towards working women. Burlin (1976) again, indicated a correlation between the father's qualifications and his daughter's career aspirations. Lighter (1980) argues that the concept of role modelling, which is based mainly on the mother-daughter dyad, is too simplistic to explain a complex phenomenon. She indicates that the social learning theory should be expanded to explain cross-sexed behaviour. Smith (1980) shares these sentiments. Other female models like female university lecturers can also play a potent role as model at a stage when the adolescent girl is looking towards new goals, values and models (Papalia & Olds, 1981).

Regarding the adolescent's attitude towards maternal employment in general, studies indicate that the working mother per se does not influence the daughter's attitude towards the dual role of housewife and career woman. The deciding factor is rather the mother's ability to integrate the two roles successfully. The dual-role pattern

must be virtually problem-free before the young woman will find it attractive (Baruch, 1972; Papalia & Olds, 1981). In a factor analysis to determine students' attitudes towards maternal employment, Walker and Walker (1977) found the following: Factor I, the effect of the working mother on children, was described as accepting, warm and protective; Factor II, the personality characteristics of the working mother, was described as unrestricted, strong, assertive, sophisticated and determined; Factor III, the emotional characteristics of the working mother, was described as agitated, tense and serious. Almquist (1974) also found that students have positive attitudes towards the working mother, but that both male and female students indicated a preference for mothers of pre-schoolers to stay at home.

To help around the house holds positive values for the adolescent. In most cases the individual's first employment occurs within the home. This experience renders a valuable period of exploring and learning whereby the adolescent can formulate values and meanings of work to then be carried over into their adult lives. In addition, the adolescent also learns about family responsibility and certain skills required for life within a home. Participation in chores also seems to enhance the quality of family relationships (Keith & Brubaker, 1980). Studies indicate that children of working mothers help more around the house than children of non-working mothers (Cogle, Tasker & Morton, 1982; Douvan, 1963; Propper, 1972). Propper (1972) could however find no confirmation for the proposition that the household chores of adolescents of working mothers are so time and energy consuming that they have little time for social and leisure activities.

Also, the proposition that working mothers are inclined to reject their children and deny them support could not be confimed. No significant differences could be found in the parent-child relationship of working and non-working mothers. Adolescents of working mothers regard their mothers as being helpful, concerned and loving. There seems to be no difference between children of working and non-working mothers in terms of contact with and access to their parents. Adolescents also indicated that they receive adequate tolerance, acceptance, reward and motivation from their working mothers (Dellas, Gaier & Emihovich, 1979; Pal & Sharma, 1981).

Like with younger children, supervision of the adolescent during the mother's abscence still seems to be a source of anxiety. In the case of the adolescent, the diminishing of supervision and guidance coincides with the often difficult period of experimentation with the complexities of adult roles. In the sixties for example, Nye (1963) found a correlation between juvenile delinquency and maternal employment. Hansson, O'Connor, Jones and Blocker (1981) found adolescents of working mothers to be more sexually active, less concerned about pregnancy risks and more ignorant about contraception. The researchers are of the opinion that while children of working mothers seem to be relatively responsible and mature, this data regarding their sexual practices identifies an area wherein certain adjustments will have to be made. They propose an educational approach to sex education.

These findings, however, are based on overseas studies, while relatively little research on the effects of maternal employment has been done in South Africa. The aim of this study then was to try to fill this void. More specifically the objectives of this study were:

* to determine whether there are differences between adolescent daughters of working mothers and non-working mothers in terms of intelligence and academic performance, work motivation and study orientation, personality

and adjustment, interests and career choices, mother-daughter relationships and attitttudes towards maternal employment.

METHOD

Measurements used in this study were the Senior Aptitude Test (SAT), the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA), the 19 Field Interest Inventory (19-FII), the Personal, Home, Social and Formal Relations Questionnaire (PHSF), the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), (Cards 1, 7 GF and 18 GF) and a Biographical Questionnaire (Attitudes towards working mothers). Arriving first year female students (aged 18-19) from the Potchefstroom University for CHE were used as subjects. By means of a questionnaire 91 students whose mothers worked and 48 students whose mothers never worked were selected. Data for the SAT, SSHA, 19-FII and PHSF was obtained during the annual general testing of arriving first year students. The TAT and Biographical Questionnaire were administered at a later date. An estimated IQ for each testee was calculated by means of the SAT. Matric results (Twelth Grade Finals) were withdrawn from each testee's personal file and calculated to an average mark. This constituted the Academic Performance of the testees.

The data was approached from a descriptive statistical framework where the groups were treated as populations. For the SAT, 19-FII and PHSF a difference of two sten-measures were regarded as significant, while the Effect Size (Cohen, 1977) was used to calculate differences in the SSHA, IQ-measurements, Academic Performance ($d = \frac{|m_A - m_B|}{\delta}$ with d = 0,2 as a small*, d = 0,5 as a medium** and d = 0,8 as a large*** effect size (significant difference)), the TAT ($\phi = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{N}} = w$ with w = ,10 as a small*, w = ,30 as a medium** and w = ,50 as a large*** effect size (significant difference)), and the Biographical Questionnaire ($\phi = 2 \sin\sqrt{P}$, $h = |\phi_1 = |\phi_2$, h = ,20 is a small*, h = ,50 is a medium** and h = ,80 is a large*** effect size (significant difference)).

No significant differences could be found in any of the measures between daughters of working mothers and daughters of non-working mothers. Some of the results can be highlighted as follows:

* Both daughters of working mothers (WM) and non-working mothers (NWM) revealed an above average study orientation (WM percentile score 95,1, NWM percentile score 94,5, d = 0,21*) on the SSHA. Lighter (1980), Macke and Morgan (1978) and Smith (1980) found daughters of working mothers to have a more positive work orientation.

* The 19-FII revealed no significant difference between the more traditional and the more innovative career choices of both groups of girls (WM : innovative 4,4 sten-measures, traditional 5,1 sten-measures. NWM : innovative 4,6 sten-measures, traditional 5 sten-measures. This finding does not confirm the findings of Almquist and Angrist (1970), Belsky et al. (1984) and Hoffman (1974) that daughters of working mothers seem to be orientated towards a more innovative career choice, more so than daughters of non-working mothers.

* Regarding the PHSF-results both groups indicated good personal and social adjustment (both scored 6 sten-measures). These results do not confirm those of Burke and Weir (1978), Gold and Andres (1978a) and Hoffman (1979) mentioned earlier.

* The TAT-results revealed the following

Card 1:

Conflict between autonomy and compliancy (Bellak, 1959). Both groups indicated no conflict. Figure 1 indicates these results.

FIGURE 1

CONFLICT BETWEEN COMPIANCY AND AUTONOMY OF DAUGHTERS OF WM AND DAUGHTERS OF NWM

Response	Daughers of WM	Daughters of NWM	X^2	w
No conflict	34	61	2,912	0,14*
Experiencing guilt	16	18		
Acknowledge parental	2	7		
Discard parental wishes	5	5		

* Small effect size

Card 7 GF:

Sex role identification (Bellak, 1959). Although both groups indicated a more positive than a negative identification, the WM-group reported a more positive identification than the NWM-group. The difference however, is too small to be significant. Figure 2 indicates the results.

FIGURE 2

SEX ROLE IDENTIFICATION OF DAUGHTERS OF WM AND DAUGHERS OF NWM

Response	Daugthers of WM	Daughters of NWM	X^2	w
No response	35	43	3,087	0,144*
Neutral	10	19		
Negative	2	6		
Positive	10	23		

* Small effect size

Pasquali and Callegari (1978) used with the Sceno-test, Card 7 GF of the TAT to determine the influence of the mother's work place (at home or otherwise) and job satisfaction on the daughter's sex role identification. Several 2x2 Anovas indicated that the mother's job satisfaction plays an important role in the daughter's positive sex role identification and that the mother's place of work plays no role.

Card 18 GF:

Mother daughter conflicts (Bellak, 1959). Both groups reported an abscence of mother-daughter conflicts. Figure 3 shows the results.

FIGURE 3

MOTHER DAUGHTER CONFLICTS OF DAUGHTERS OF WM AND DAUGHTERS OF NWM

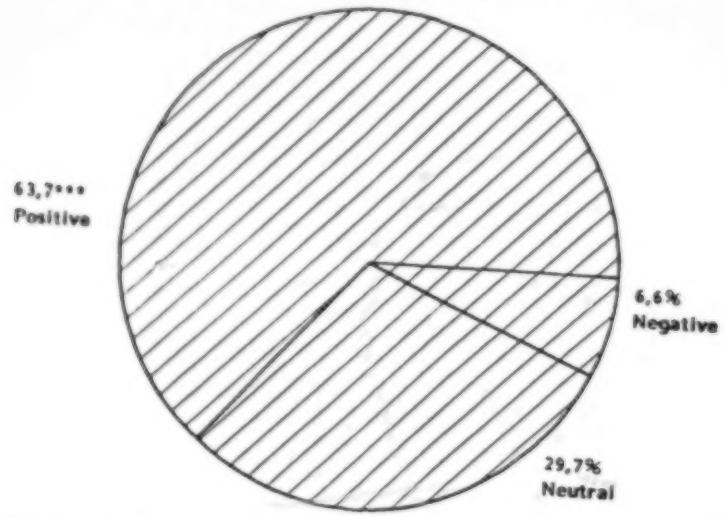
Response	Daughters of WM	Daughters of NWM	X^2	w
Conflicts absent	54	82	0,369	0,050
Conflicts present	3	7		

* The Biographical Questionnaire indicated the following:

- Daugters of working mothers indicated that their fathers have a significantly positive attitude towards maternal employment. Hoffman (1974), Lighter (1980), Spitze and Waite (1981), Stuckey, McGhee and Bell (1982) all referred to the value of the father's positive attitude towards his wife's employment. Figure 4 indicates the results of the present study.

FIGURE 4

The daughters of working mothers' perception of the fathers' attitude towards maternal employment

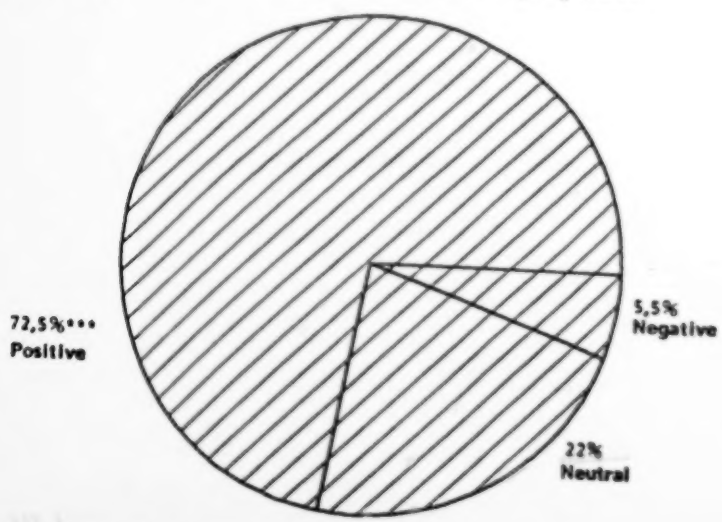


*** Large effect size

- Daugthers of WM also indicated a significantly positive attitude towards their mother's employment. Baruch (1972), Hoffman (1974) and Trimberger and Maclean (1982) indicated if the mother has a positive attitude towards her work, the child will also have a positive attitude towards her mother's employment. Figure 5 indicates the results.

FIGURE 5

The daughter's attitude towards her mother's employment

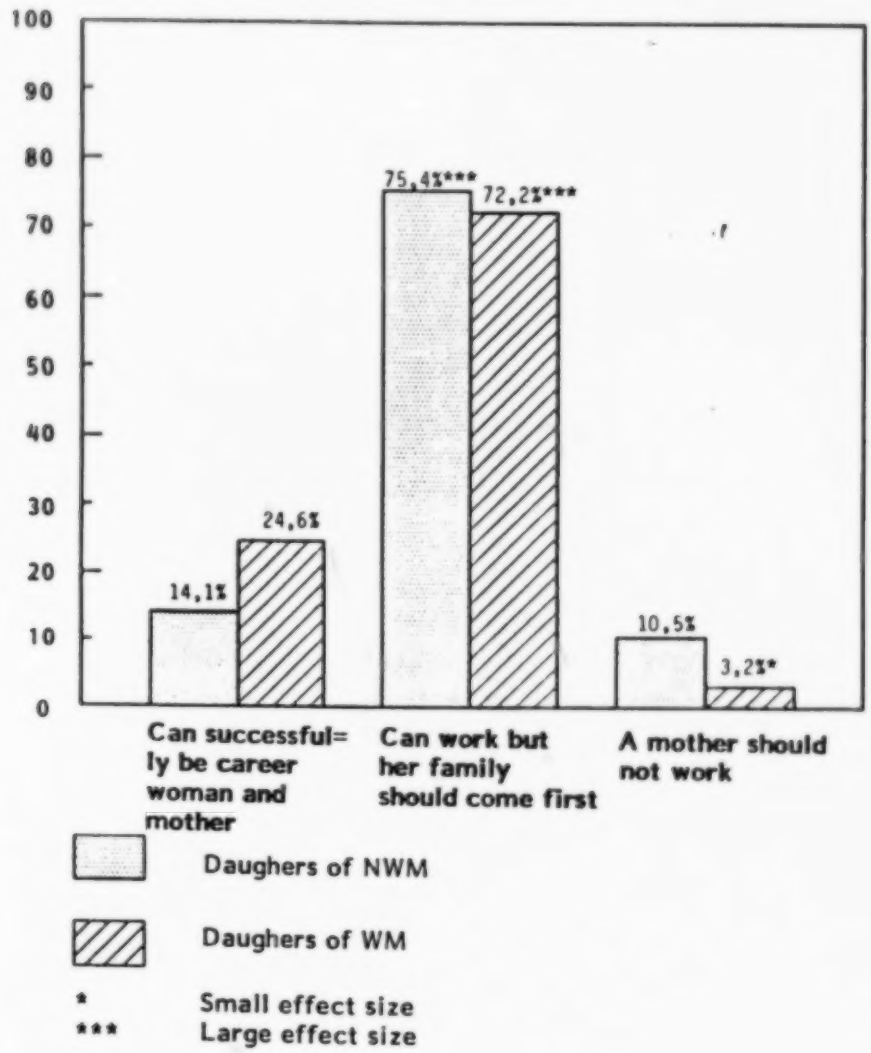


*** Large effect size

- Both daughters of WM and NWM indicated a positive attitude towards maternal employment in general but that her family should come first. These results confirm those of Baruch (1972), Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport (1971), Orden and Bradburn (1969) and Wessels (1981). Figure 6 indicates the results of the present study.

FIGURE 6

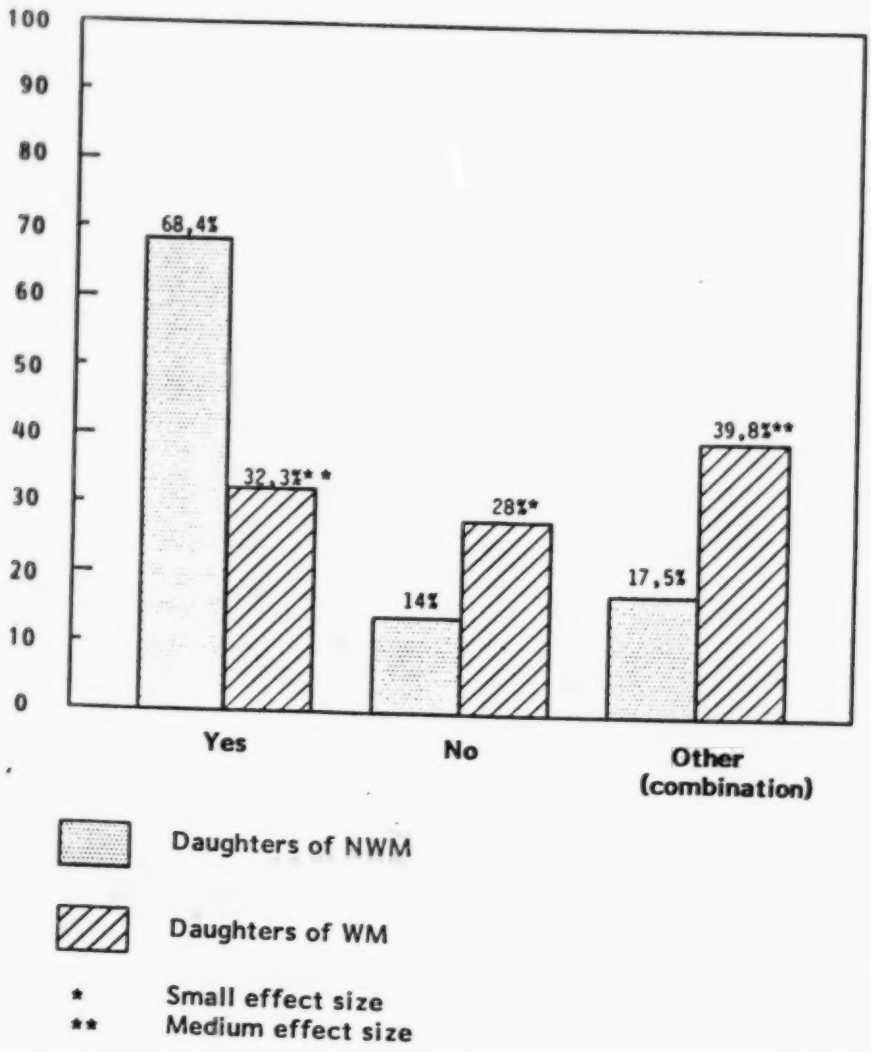
Attitudes of daughters of WM and NWM towards maternal employment



- Daugthers of NWM indicated more than the WM-group that they would rather stay at home than work when they have small children. More daughters in the WM-group indicated that they would not like to stay at home and would prefer a combination of the two roles. The differences between the two groups are not significant, however. Figure 7 indicates the results.

FIGURE 7

Attitudes of daughters of WM and NWM towards the care of their own families



- In a question to daughters of NWM whether they would have preferred their mothers to work or not, 84,2% indicated that they would not have like their mothers to work. The following reasons were given:

  "Her full-time attention meant a lot to me."

  "It was good to have her close when I was home. I wouldn't have had such good communication with her had she worked."

  "She lives a full life at home. She enjoys gardening and sewing."

- 15,8 Per cent indicated they would have like their mothers to work. The following reasons were given:

  "To help financially."

  "Perhaps she would have had a fuller life with more friends and in opportunities.

- In general however, results indicate that both groups have a favourable attitude towards maternal employment. Almquist (1972) also indicated that students have a positive attitude towards maternal employment but would prefer to stay at home while their families are still young.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to be drawn from the above results are, that for this particular study, there seems to be no significant differences between daughters of working mothers and daughters of non-working mothers. The results indicate no negative effect of the working mother on her daughter. On the other hand, the proposition that the adolescent daughter benefits from her mother's employment was not confirmed. The following reasons could be proposed for these findings:

* The changing social climate and social norms have rendered the working mother freedom to engage in a career. Without the social pressure she is psychologically freer in her interaction with her family, which could only lead to positive results. Because mother is happy, child is also happy.

* Research has indicated the importance of the father's (and the mother's)attitude towards maternal employment. This study has indicated that the fathers and daughters have a positive attitude towards the working mother. A logical deduction would then be that the mother also has a positive attitude towards her employment. Thus, happy father - happy mother - happy child - and the chances that maternal employment has a negative influence on the child is minimal.

* The subjects used in this study are university students and are therefore a selected group. This could account for the reason why the WM-group did not score significantly higher than the NWM-group on the various measures, as proposed by other studies. Perhaps the mother is a housewife by choice and finds fulfilment and happiness in her role as housewife and mother. Her satisfaction is modelled to her daughter and once again, the circular process: happy mother - happy daughter. At the same time the housewife can encourage independence, work orientation, innovative career choices etc., by modelling

a broader outlook in life rather than only her own immediate world of experience.

* The results could also be explained in terms of Erikson's (1984) proposal that development occurs in a continual wider expanding social radius. During children's school years they progressively move into the greater society where they start interacting with a variety of institutions and persons and start to form identifications with other influential models. The individual thus gradually moves away from the family as the chief influencing source, to include other members of the society. Bearing this in mind, it suffices that children's attitudes are not solely formed by family situations. Therefore the mother's work status per se (be it housewife or career woman) will only play a limited role in the determination of influence and attitudes bestowed upon the child. This is particularly true of adolescents who are exposed to a wider community and are subjected to peer group pressures. Thus, maternal employment could be regarded as only one in a group of variables that leave their mark on the adolescent's development.

* When the abovementioned is taken into consideration, the possibility exists that the measuring instruments and/or research design in this study was not refined enough to capture differences between the two groups.

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